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An Analysis of the Objectivist Ethics in Educational Leadership Though Ayn Rand's *The Virtues of Selfishness* (1964)

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ABSTRACT

Educational leadership is vital to sustain quality educational institutions. It is the role of the school leader to indoctrinate stakeholders with the objectivist ethic-embracing egoism and relinquishing altruistic ideals when it comes to invigorating the system with sustainable change. Ayn Rand's timeless piece of literature *The Virtue of Selfishness* (1964) is the foundation for incorporating these ideals into the educational arena around the world.

Introduction

Ayn Rand's beliefs are instrumental in developing and nurturing objectivist ideals. She embraces the importance of being selfish in order to restore individualism and objectivism. Ms. Rand stresses that people often disregard their own individualism in order to concede with the prevailing thoughts of society. Individuals, in an effort to be a part of the status quo, often go against their own ideals. The prevalence of this common occurrence by school leaders in schools around the world must end. School leaders, as individuals, must challenge themselves to practice egoism and disregard the ideals of altruism.

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this article is to provide ten key recommendations for educational leaders around the world to embrace based on the objectivist ideals of Ayn Rand in her timeless text *The Virtue of Selfishness* (1964). Educational leadership is vital to sustain quality educational institutions. It is the role of the school leader to indoctrinate stakeholders with the objectivist ethic- embracing egoism and relinquishing altruistic ideals when it comes to invigorating the system with sustainable change.

Recommendations

Recommendation # 1: School leaders should not make decisions that are based solely upon society's ideals. School leaders who are facilitating change in the era of accountability must not make decisions that are based solely upon society's ideals. This happens all too often in schools worldwide. One of man's greatest fears is to be alone and not part of an established group. He will sacrifice what he rationalizes to be right to belong to society. In essence, he has sold his rational soul to the general consensus of a group of people. Rand writes that even the great philosopher Aristotle often signified what he perceived to be right or wrong by adapting to the ideals of "what the noble and wise men of his time chose to do, leaving the unanswered questions of: why they chose to do it and why he evaluated them as noble and wise" (1964, p.14).

Many school leaders fail to question if their values or what they deem to be right or wrong are aligned with society. They take society's philosophy to be true. To go against the norms in society is seen as a form of disapproval. Many people rather deny their own knowledge and seek to conform to the standards of society. In reality, only about two percent of the wealthy population controls the thought patterns and beliefs of ninety- eight percent of the general population. The wealthy, even in Aristotle's time, controls what society as a whole perceives and accepts as truths. As a result, our virtues are those of what society and not that of what the individual values and supports. School leaders must distinguish what he or she values from that of society.

Recommendation # 2: School leaders must be self- confident, rational thinkers who possess strong values and ethics. According to Rand, “A rational, self- confident man is motivated by a love of values and a desire to achieve them. A neurotic is motivated by fear and by a desire to escape it” (1964, p. 74). School leaders must demonstrate self-confidence as they lead staff and students. Their character should not be questioned. Ethical school leaders must lead with an intense integrity. Since, ethics is extremely important, school leaders need to do what right and moral in order to survive in today’s schools.

Ms. Rand and her colleague Mr. Branden believe that irrational people program themselves with self- destructive desires. People need to look at their best interests to ensure that they do not become a part of an irrational situation. They must not be observers of acts that they know are foolish and do nothing about it. To allow the acts to go on will make them an accessory to a crime. Irrational people will bring them down in the process and think nothing of their good character. As a result, I agree with Ms. Rand when she implies that a person’s judgment reveals their true character.

Recommendation # 3: School leaders must not coerce stakeholders to perform duties outside of their comfort zone. Ayn Rand writes “to violate man’s rights means to compel him to act against his own judgment, or to expropriate his values” (1964, p.111). School leaders must not coerce others to perform duties for them that go against the individual’s beliefs. They must be recognizant of the strengths and weaknesses of their stakeholders and be able to tap into the talents of others. Stakeholders must judge for themselves what they deem they are extremely skilled at handling and school leaders must rely upon this judgment to help schools run efficiently. Relationships must be established with stakeholders that benefit the self without harming others, so that no harm or destruction is caused by practicing selfishness.

Recommendation # 4: School leaders must encourage others to build on their strengths and to become productive through their individual work. “No man can have a right to impose an unchosen obligation, an unrewarded duty or obligation, an unrewarded duty or an involuntary servitude on another man (Rand, 1964, p.113). People must rely on themselves to pursue their goals. School leaders must not select a staff member to perform a task that he or she is unwilling or does not have the competency to perform. They must encourage others to develop themselves by allowing them to choose staff developments that aide in improving their individualized skills and attributes. By having a well- defined skill set, staff members will be better prepared to perform work tasks and become productive. By becoming productive, staff members gain self-gratification through the work they produce for the organization.

Recommendation # 5: School leaders must make rational judgments and not simply react to situational changes in education. “Since man’s mind is his basic tool of survival, his means of gaining knowledge to guide his actions- the basic conditions he requires is the freedom to think and act according to his rational judgment” (Rand, 1964, p.125). Some say it is immoral to identify a moral code, but that makes no sense to how politics and districts dictate standards for principals and other school leaders to implement in schools. It more acceptable for school leaders to make errors in moral

judgment than it is to refuse to judge at all or to judge against an untenable moral standard such as altruism. School leaders must stand by their judgments and believe that they were acting with integrity.

Some school leaders insist on making moral decisions that compromises the integrity of their individualized judgment because they are unwilling to be good or because they fear being judged as bad when dealing with situations that may arise. School leaders must not simply just react to problems in a compromising manner. They must be proactive and lead with resounding fortitude about what is right and wrong. A gray area should not exist, nor should the suggestion of a judgment be made without clarity or under guidance of the individual's moral ethic. When compromise is the standard of school leaders instead of individual rational judgments, then their virtue is the number of values they are willing to betray.

Recommendation # 6: School leaders must not be altruistic when creating a vision and mission for their school. Ms. Rand rejects altruism which is the belief that self-sacrifice to consider one's own well-being is the moral ideal for each human individual. Selfishness is a virtue because it protects the self from unnecessary strife caused by external sources. To be selfish in Rand's perspective is to be self-respecting and self-supporting human beings. The person is not seen as a sacrificial lamb to others and others do not rely upon him to support their agendas. Altruism creates injustice to man because it is defined by *who* is influenced rather than *how* they are influenced. Rand believes that tyrants, in this case- autocratic school leaders, think they are acting on behalf of others. Moreover, altruism generates resentment between school leaders and their subordinates because they rely on each other to get what they want. As a result, Rand believes this to be an evil ideal.

However, this belief is not always an ordinary occurrence in schools when leaders create their school's vision and mission. The current trend in schools is to have input from staff members when developing school beliefs so that stakeholders will buy-in to the ideas. While input is given by some, other stakeholders are relying on others to get what they want. Make no mistake about it, everyone has an agenda and will utilize each others' skills, attributes, and influence to attain their desires. The school leader has to strong enough to assess stakeholders and determine which organizational ideals will encourage staff members to be self-sufficient and develop self-efficacy.

Jacobs agrees in part with Rand on the notion that people need to rely upon themselves to pursue their goals. People should make the best decisions for themselves and not be subjected to unnecessary burdens placed on them by others. Furthermore, she believes that selfishness is indeed a virtue that needs to be safeguarded. People must maintain a sense of accomplishment in their own right before involving others to solve their problems. Is it too much to ask others to do all that they can humanly do to assist themselves before asking or relying upon another person? Jacobs believes that Ms. Rand is correct. More people in our society must feel compelled to make rational decisions and be productive according to their own means.

Although we live in a social world, there will come a time when we cannot solely rely upon ourselves and must collaborate with others. Rand believes that in order for people to maximize the value of their interactions with others they should cultivate a firm

commitment to the virtues of rationality, justice, productiveness, and benevolence. However, she does not advocate violence under any circumstance only to protect oneself. Subjectivists, according to Rand, believe people should pursue their whims. School leaders should not be subjectivists. Objectivists believe desires should be evaluated rationally. Reason is the only standard of value and criterion of interest that school leaders should embrace (1964, p.25).

Recommendation # 7: School leaders must be able to create a legacy. “Man is the only species that can transmit and expand his store of knowledge from generation to generation” (Rand, 1964, p.125). The goal of education is to provide a storehouse of information to young minds in an effort to improve their quality of life by aiding in guiding how decisions are made in each of their life. The impact of strong school leaders must be able to last past their leaving the realms at the top. Stakeholders must be developed in a way that will aide them in progressing the work of the leader long past his or her administration. By training others, knowledge and progress will pass from generation to generation. Man, such as school leaders and their stakeholders, need “knowledge in order to live” (Rand, 1965, p. 24). As a result, a strong, vital legacy will be the longstanding impact of the school leader’s work in passing on knowledge to others. This is the only means for cultivating sustaining change.

Recommendation # 8: School leaders must embrace egoism as a means to cultivate their own happiness. The authors advocates that people should only try to make themselves happy and healthy. By doing this, people should not feel guilty about meeting their own needs first. Moreover, she makes an outstanding argument for the individual denying others to meet their own needs. In essence, Ms. Rand infers the idea that people should not feel compelled to make sacrifices for others. They should only do so if they decide that that is something they choose to do through their own rationalization. Furthermore, Ms. Rand implies that a society that is based upon its own self interest will eventually eliminate the weak and be left with the strong members.

Recommendation # 9: School leaders must develop their own skill sets and be prepared to handle critics with pre-established agendas. Man should have reasons why he justly supports a thought. According to Ms. Rand, he needs to constantly grow by challenging his mind and competence levels by discovering new knowledge. Here is where man builds his self- esteem and learns new reasoning patterns to sustain life as we know it. Man should never work collectively to support an effort that goes against his intellectual thoughts. This should occur even if coercion is placed upon him by outside sources with their own agendas. Every school leader will have critics. It is vital that school leaders prepare themselves to handle pre-established agendas that go against the vision and mission of what he or she is trying to accomplish within the confines of the school or school system.

Recommendation # 10: School leaders must never compromise their standards. According to Ayn Rand, people should see things as either right or wrong. There are no gray areas in life. Jacobs, in fact, disagrees with her. She believes that one may make a

rationalized decision about a certain circumstance and believe it to be true. However, one may not completely investigate the circumstance and not know the background of the situation in order to base the decision. As a result, Jacobs believes that there are varying shades of gray that come into play as we continually make decisions throughout life. She does not believe that when she compromises her decisions she lowers her standards and betrays her virtues. Instead she believes that once she finds a better solution given by someone else, she is better able to rectify the situation because a more improved one has been presented to her. Compromising does not lower standards and neither does changing one's mind for a better idea will betray one's virtues.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, a school leader's judgment reveals his character in leading an organization. School leaders must not betray their own individual, rational thoughts in order to compromise. If school leaders compromise, they are not leading. Sustainable change cannot exist under the guise of these falsehoods. The purpose of this article is to provide ten key recommendations for educational leaders around the world to embrace based on the objectivist ideals of Ayn Rand in her timeless text *The Virtue of Selfishness* (1964).

The following ten ideals or recommendations must be taken into consideration by school leaders :

- 1) School leaders should not make decisions that are based solely upon society's ideals;
- 2) School leaders must be self-confident, rational thinkers who possess strong values and ethics;
- 3) School leaders must not coerce stakeholders to perform duties outside of their comfort zone;
- 4) School leaders must encourage others to build on their strengths and to become productive through their individual work;
- 5) School leaders must make rational judgments and not simply react to situational changes in education;
- 6) School leaders must not be altruistic when creating a vision and mission for their school;
- 7) School leaders must be able to create a legacy;
- 8) School leaders must embrace egoism as a means to cultivate their own happiness;
- 9) School leaders must develop their own skill sets and be prepared to handle critics with pre-established agendas; and
- 10) School leaders must never compromise their standards.

Ayn Rand's objectivist philosophy speaks to school leaders in a manner that promotes strong educational leadership with lasting legacies. Educational leadership is vital to sustain quality educational institutions. It is the role of the school leader to indoctrinate stakeholders with the objectivist ethic- embracing egoism and relinquishing altruistic ideals- by Ayn Rand in *The Virtues of Selfishness* (1964) when it comes to invigorating the system with sustainable change.

References

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